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REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION AND OF ITS INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS, INCLUDING SUPPORT TO REGIONAL ACTION PROGRAMMES

Note by the secretariat

CONTENTS

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	INTRODUCTION	1-4	2
II.	MEASURES TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION IN AFRICA	5-21	2
III.	MEASURES TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION IN ASIA	22-25	5
IV.	MEASURES TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN	26-32	6
V.	MEASURES TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION IN THE NORTHERN MEDITERRANEAN AND OTHER EUROPEAN REGIONS	33-36	7
	Annex		
	Major national, subregional and regional meetings with secretariat involvement, July 1997 - October 1998		8

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. At the first session of the Conference on the Parties (COP 1), the Conference had before it document ICCD/COP(1)/7, which reported on activities relating to implementation of the Convention which the secretariat had supported or in which the secretariat had participated during the period from the adoption of the Convention in June 1994 to its coming into force in December 1996. This present note serves to provide information on such secretariat activities for the period August 1997 - July 1998. It provides an overview of such activities and measures taken by the secretariat to ensure the continuity and coherence of these initiatives with those taken during the interim period. Such measures took the form of financial and technical assistance which was mostly secured through contributions to the Trust Fund established under General Assembly resolution 47/188. Initiatives of the Parties at the national, subregional and regional levels have reached a stage of maturity that now calls in some cases for the conclusion of partnership arrangements.

2. Lessons from this initial phase of the implementation process can be highlighted as follows. At the national level, institutional arrangements for the coordination of the implementation of the Convention process play a key role in facilitating the launching of national action programmes. National focal points and national coordinating committees need to be established at the appropriate level of seniority to mobilize a broad response of the administration and the civil society, to review the linkages with other strategic programming frameworks for sustainable development and to mobilize a critical level of resources. It is important to view the national action programme as an iterative process rather than the production of a planning document.

3. Emerging forms of international collaboration under the Convention at the subregional, regional and interregional levels have led to the identification of priority areas of focus in the respective regions. Parties are favouring flexible modalities of cooperation such as thematic programme networks, which build on existing scientific capacities and ongoing programmes. Interested scientific institutions from developed country Parties are invited to join in these networks as non-regional members.

4. The information contained in this note is limited to specific activities in which the secretariat made a contribution either by participation or through financial support. It does not reflect a comprehensive picture of the status of implementation of the Convention or overall trends in implementation. However, the experience gained by the secretariat during the interim period clearly shows that there are some key issues that must be addressed if the Convention is to progress to the satisfaction of all Parties. Such issues include the need to streamline the multiple strategic planning frameworks for the affected country Parties; the need for a much closer cooperation at country level, between multilateral institutions and donor agencies in responding to the many challenges emerging from the Convention's implementation; the need to channel resources directly to the local level in order to make a difference in the affected areas; and the need to structure on a predictable basis, the level of financial support that may be expected by an affected country over the life of a programme cycle.

II. MEASURES TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION IN AFRICA

5. In Africa, many activities have been undertaken and initial implementation measures are already well advanced, following the adoption and the immediate entry into force of the resolution on urgent action for Africa in June 1994, at the fifth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for a Convention to Combat Desertification two and a half years before the coming into force of the Convention itself.

6. At the national level, African countries are at various stages of drawing up their national action programmes, and some have launched relevant activities, including: broad based consultative processes with relevant actors, in order to provide guidance on flexible planning and strategy; review of existing projects, programmes and plans relating to the fight against desertification and harmonization of national strategic planning frameworks; institutional support to the national coordinating bodies responsible for formulating national action

programmes; identification of priority measures to be taken through consultative processes; assessments of existing and potential sources of funding; elaboration of projects based on identified needs; and organization of national fora.

7. In the field of information and awareness raising, valuable efforts continue to be made. The national awareness raising seminars which were organized in about 30 countries (reported in document ICCD/COP(1)/7) were followed, in some cases, by awareness campaigns at the local level in order to bring the Convention and the debate on ways and means to combat desertification closer to the actors in the field.

8. In the most advanced countries, the consultative processes which took place countrywide in the framework of the elaboration of the national action programmes, as stipulated by the Convention, provided an additional opportunity to make the Convention and the problem of desertification better known.

9. With respect to the participatory and consultative mechanisms intended to lead to the elaboration of national action programmes, a few more countries (such as Angola, Madagascar) also did set up institutional coordinating bodies. These countries also nominated focal points for the implementation of the Convention, with a view to facilitating the elaboration of these programmes. Furthermore, a few of them held national fora to launch the process of Convention implementation (Botswana, Lesotho, Niger, Zimbabwe).

10. Two countries (Burkina Faso and Cape Verde) organized a second forum aimed at adopting the national action programmes they had elaborated on the basis of the participatory and consultative approaches which are emphasized in the Convention.

11. In Eastern and Southern Africa, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) are playing a major role in helping 15 countries to elaborate their national action programmes: Angola, Botswana, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Mozambique, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

12. It is noteworthy that some countries were selected as "chef de file" in order to coordinate and foster the process on the part of the external partners. In general, the contribution of the "chef de file" confirmed the difficulty of involving external partners in a structured response to the needs emerging from the national action programme process, especially bilateral ones. Parties may wish to consider preparing a schedule for partnership arrangements as advocated by the Convention. Such arrangements are essential to implementing national action programmes, starting with the least developed countries, and it is the view of the secretariat that their initiation should continue to be the major focus of the international community during the period leading up to COP 3.

13. At the subregional level, consultations took place to elaborate further subregional action programmes. Specific issues were reviewed at this level in technical meetings. The following summarizes the endeavors made by the organizations that have been given the responsibility to lead the process in each subregion:

(a) The Niamey meeting referred to in document ICCD/COP(1)/7 took place as scheduled in July 1997. It represented a significant step in the preparation of the subregional action programme to combat desertification in West Africa. This dialogue enabled the various actors involved in the process to define the framework and principles intended to serve as references and guidelines for preparation and implementation of the programme. More specifically, one of the main results of this meeting was the setting-up of a mechanism including, among others, a subregional coordination committee that was entrusted with the development and adoption of priority actions within the subregional action programme, following a five-step procedure;

(b) The first three steps, which constituted the elaboration of the programme, have now been undertaken and the two remaining ones aimed at having it adopted respectively by the Council of Ministers in charge of Agriculture and Environment of the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel

(CILSS) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and finally by the Conference of ECOWAS Heads of State, including Chad, are imminent;

(c) The Southern African Development Community was active and dynamic. SADC had already embarked on concrete projects prior to COP 1 that the organization pursued. Early warning systems, tied to food security and environment monitoring, are a main element of an effective subregional action programme. Accordingly, SADC sought support from the secretariat to strengthen the existing early warning systems in the southern Africa subregion;

(d) The updating of the Kalahari-Namib Action Plan was adopted as another objective of SADC. This action plan for semi-arid zones involving all countries which share the Kalahari-Namib ecosystem had been designed two years previously, but still remained largely unfulfilled for a variety of reasons;

(e) In both cases, the purpose of the activities undertaken was to review the existing situation in order to elaborate new programme proposals in the context of the Convention. The secretariat supported both initiatives by assisting SADC to hold focal point meetings and to benefit through technical backstopping from consultancies;

(f) With respect to early warning systems, a workshop held in Harare in April 1998 made recommendations for the rationalization of tasks in the field of information (data collection and dissemination) and capacity-building;

(g) The approval of the recommendations of a study on the Kalahari-Namib Action Plan led to two follow-up programmes (participatory monitoring for the national action programme process and desertification information sharing system). SADC is now seeking support for implementing these follow-up programmes.

14. As part of the preparatory activities undertaken towards the implementation of the Convention at the subregional level, several Maghreb and Sahel countries have been attempting, over the last two years, to promote pilot projects located in border areas with a view to managing shared natural resources in a more effective manner. As a result of a meeting held in Ouagadougou in August 1996, a number of sites emerged as potential sites for such pilot projects. A methodology to design specific projects was also identified at that meeting. The secretariat, in close collaboration with the United Nations specialized agencies and other interested partners, is now involved in the setting-up of missions that should lead to a more precise formulation of the first project within this framework.

15. At the regional level, the secretariat committed itself to assist in implementing the decisions made during the Panafrican Conference on the implementation of the CCD held in Ouagadougou in March 1997.

16. The Panafrican Conference recommended that the elaboration of the regional action programme be drawn up on the basis of a series of seven thematic workshops, which would each concentrate on a theme considered to be of main concern for the region.

17. At this stage, three of these workshops have already taken place: the first one dealt with ecological monitoring, natural resources mapping, remote sensing and early warning systems, the second with agroforestry and soil conservation, and the third was on the rational use of rangelands and development of fodder crops. A fourth meeting on the promotion of new and renewable energy sources and technologies, will be held before the COP 2.

18. An important objective of these regional meetings is the promotion of efficient networks in all the priority areas of the regional action programme in Africa.

19. Africa has also initiated the process of establishing a regional coordination unit, whose main purpose would be to support Parties in ensuring the implementation of the Convention.

20. The conferences of non-governmental organizations at the regional and subregional levels in 1998 supported regional preparation of such organizations for COP 2. The conferences stimulated an exchange of information and activities and

strengthened the importance of networking, the role of women, and the role of non-governmental organizations in the region.

21. The non-governmental organization forum of Portuguese-speaking countries led to the formation of partnerships and development of integrated projects and activities among such organizations in those countries. It also established a follow-up committee with specific functions, and drew up recommendations for action to address poverty alleviation.

III. MEASURES TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION IN ASIA

22. At the national level, in the period under review, awareness seminars were held in six Asian countries. In addition, the secretariat continued its institutional support to Mongolia and started to provide institutional support to Kyrgyzstan. This support aims at strengthening national capacities in the preparation of national action programmes to combat desertification and drought. Several countries have received catalytical support from the United Nations to advance preparation of such programmes. Others are ready to carry this work forward, but are still in the process of seeking external support.

23. At the subregional and interregional levels, the following activities have taken place:

(a) Participants at the subregional consultation meeting of Western Asia held in Damascus in April 1997, endorsed a range of conclusions and recommendations for the preparation of a subregional action programme. The four thematic programme networks that they endorsed to support the programme were further elaborated with the help of the Arab Centre for the Study of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD), the International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) and the Centre for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe (CEDARE). These programmes and the further advancement of the subregional action programme will be discussed at the international expert group meeting to be held in Muscat in September 1998;

(b) Following the Tashkent interregional conference on the implementation of the CCD, held in June 1997, for Central Asian States and other countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, questionnaires on the role countries could play in 12 areas of cooperation identified in the interregional process were distributed and their results analysed. Work is under way to facilitate progress in the development of an interregional action programme next year, taking into account the progress of accession to the Convention amongst countries in Eastern Europe;

(c) The second Asia-Africa forum on the implementation of the CCD took place in Niamey, Niger in September 1997. Participants exchanged views and identified areas of common interest in the implementation of their respective action programmes. Concrete proposals were endorsed, including the establishment of an Afro-Asian training centre to combat desertification, in Beijing, China. As this exchange of experience was deemed useful, a forthcoming forum will include countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

24. The non-governmental organization conference of newly independent States held in Issyk-Kul, Kyrgyzstan from 2 to 4 May 1997, was a land-mark for Central Asian non-governmental organizations. It stimulated exchanges among such organizations in the region, raised awareness of the Convention and encouraged non-governmental organization participation in the Convention in an area of the world where relationships between such organizations and governments are still being defined. As a result, the secretariat is actively supporting non-governmental organizations at the national level, taking into account the gender dimension of proposed activities.

25. At the regional level, Asian countries have made substantial progress:

(a) The regional ministerial conference held in Beijing, in May 1997, provided important guidelines to strengthen regional cooperation across Asia, and participants endorsed the preparation of a regional action programme and the development of six thematic programme networks. China, India and Iran have already agreed to host one network each: China is hosting the network on desertification

monitoring and assessment; India that on agroforestry and soil conservation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas; and Iran the one on rangelands management in arid areas, including the fixation of sand dunes. The status of preparation of these networks and broader issues relating to regional cooperation in Asia will be reviewed at the international expert group meeting to be convened in Bangkok in November 1998. Launching meetings for the first three networks are planned to take place in 1999;

(b) At the first Asian national focal points meeting in Ohtsu, Japan, participants, including 13 government representatives, reported and discussed the progress made in the implementation of the Convention in their countries. They adopted recommendations for facilitating implementation of the Convention, and called for a stronger role of regional and financial institutions in support of the process.

IV. MEASURES TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

26. At the national level, a number of countries initiated national awareness seminars, campaigns and workshops with the aim of preparing national action programmes. Some countries have already started the implementation of their national action programmes, while others have designated national focal points.

27. Since COP 1, eight countries of the region have ratified the Convention. In addition, the countries of the region have also been steadily increasing and developing various activities at both regional and subregional levels. It is clear that public awareness of the dangers of the phenomenon of land degradation and loss of economic productivity of the land have greatly increased, but there is still the need for further analysis and dissemination of information to all national authorities and the population as a whole, so as to sensitize the public at large on the importance of this issue.

28. At the subregional level, activities continue in the Grand Chaco Americano region of Argentina, Bolivia and Paraguay and the Puna Americana areas of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador and Peru. There are efforts to develop a project for the protection of the ecosystem of Hispaniola Island, which comprises Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

29. At the regional level, the fourth regional meeting took place in Antigua and Barbuda from 27 April to 1 May 1998, with the participation of 27 countries, international agencies and non-governmental organizations. The aim of this meeting was to find solutions to common problems as well as to examine and approve projects including, *inter alia*:

(a) The development of the regional network to combat desertification and/or the development and strengthening of national networks;

(b) The selection and development of methodologies for the evaluation and monitoring of desertification and for the promotion of the use of geographic information systems at the national level;

(c) Improving horizontal cooperation;

(d) Training for the implementation of the Convention;

(e) The establishment of a regional system for the management of investments to combat desertification;

(f) Implementation of local education activities to combat desertification;

(g) Technical assistance to Haiti;

(h) The development of the regional coordinating unit based in Mexico City.

30. Representatives of non-governmental organizations were accorded full participation rights in the intergovernmental meeting and were able to contribute directly to the discussions.

31. The secretariat, in collaboration with the regional executive committee (elected at the regional meeting held in Antigua and Barbuda), has been taking the necessary steps to ensure sufficient funding for the realization of the above-mentioned projects.

32. The first Africa/Latin America and the Caribbean forum, having as its aim the creation of a platform for cooperation between the regions, is planned to take place in Recife, Brazil from 14 to 16 October 1998.

V. MEASURES TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION IN THE NORTHERN MEDITERRANEAN AND OTHER EUROPEAN REGIONS

33. At the national level, in many countries, core ministries responsible for implementation of the Convention are dealing with the institutional aspects of inter-ministerial coordination, while launching information campaigns to ensure broad cross-sectoral coverage of CCD activities. National awareness seminars and information days were launched in seven European countries. National action programmes are also being prepared in affected European Union member country Parties.

34. At the regional level, a group of Annex IV countries met in Athens to disseminate scientific data and information, to review progress of relevant national programmes and develop information links and activities with the European Union, in order to increase efforts in implementing the Convention.

35. Countries of the Northern Mediterranean region will continue their work on benchmarks and indicators at meetings being organized by Italy before COP 2.

36. The secretariat has been facilitating the process of accession of Eastern and Central European countries to the Convention. In order to accelerate this process, the secretariat organized in Geneva a briefing for representatives of permanent missions of Eastern and Central European countries that also reviewed options for developing closer cooperation within the region. It also undertook to organize national awareness seminars and/or information days in seven Eastern and Central European countries.

Annex

MAJOR NATIONAL, SUBREGIONAL AND REGIONAL MEETINGS WITH SECRETARIAT INVOLVEMENT, JULY 1997 - OCTOBER 1998

Africa

1997

1-3 July	Ouagadougou	Seminar on the Global Environment Facility and the funding of actions to combat desertification in Burkina Faso
8-11 July	Ouagadougou	Forum for the formulation of national action programme in Burkina Faso
21-23 July	Niamey	Forum on the subregional action programme for West African countries (CILSS/ECOWAS) in Niger
2-5 September	Niamey	Second Asia-Africa forum on combating desertification in Niger
8-12 September	Dakar	Regional NGO conference on the implementation of the CCD in Senegal
16-19 September	Maseru	Third technical workshop for African focal points for CCD and their major cooperating partners in Lesotho
20-22 October	Gaborone	National forum on the CCD in Botswana
27-28 November	Praia	NGO Conference of Portuguese-speaking countries in Cape Verde

1998

10-13 March	Kano	West African subregional anglophone NGO workshop in Nigeria
17-19 March	Maseru	National forum on the CCD in Lesotho
23-25 March	Praia	National forum to adopt a national action programme to combat desertification in Cape Verde
23-27 March	Johannesburg	Southern African subregional NGO workshop in South Africa
30-31 March	Gaborone	Consultative meeting on the review of the Kalahari Namib action plan in Botswana
20-22 April	Niamey	National forum to adopt a national environmental plan towards sustainable development in Niger
20-22 April	Harare	Workshop on strengthening the SADC early warning systems in Zimbabwe
23-27 April	Maroua	Women's regional NGO workshop in Cameroon
5-8 May	Nairobi	Regional workshop for the promotion of a network on ecological monitoring, natural resources mapping, remote sensing and early warning systems in Africa in Kenya
28-30 May	Bamako	National forum to adopt a national action programme to combat desertification in Mali
1-5 June	Swakopmund	Consultations on establishment of a multidisciplinary scientific and technical consultative committee for SADC in Namibia
30 June-3 July	Bamako	Regional workshop on a network for the promotion of agroforestry and soil conservation in the context of the regional action programme in Mali
4 July	Bamako	UMA-CILSS meeting on the re-launching of pilot projects in transboundary areas in Mali

4-7 August	Addis Ababa	Thematic workshop on rational use of rangelands and development of fodder crops in the context of the regional action programme in Ethiopia
29 Sep.-2 Oct.	Abidjan	Thematic workshop on integrated management of international river, lake and hydrogeological basins in the context of the regional action programme in Cote d'Ivoire
26-29 October	Tunis	Thematic workshop on new and renewable energy sources and technologies in the context of the regional action programme in Tunisia
2-5 November	Tunis	Africa regional preparatory conference in the context of COP 2

Asia

1997

2-3 July	Ulaan Baatar	National awareness seminar in Mongolia
2-5 September	Niamey	Second Asia-Africa forum on the implementation of the CCD in Niger
10-12 September	Bishkek	National awareness seminar in Kyrgyzstan
4-5 November	Kathmandu	National awareness seminar in Nepal

1998

16-17 April	Dushanbe	National awareness seminar in Tadjikistan
21-22 April	Dhaka	National awareness seminar in Bangladesh
26 -28 May	Ohtsu	First national focal points meeting for Asia in Japan
14-16 September	Muscat	International expert group meeting for the preparation of a subregional action programme in Western Asia in Oman
September/ October	Phnom Penh	National awareness seminar in Cambodia
September/ October	Hanoi	National awareness seminar in Viet Nam

Latin America and the Caribbean

1997

28-30 October	Panama City	National awareness seminar in Panama

1998

23-25 February	San Salvador	National awareness seminar in El Salvador
4-11 March	Port-au-Prince	Visit of UNITAR mission for the formulation of the national capacity-building programme in Haiti
16-18 March	Tegucigalpa	National awareness seminar in Honduras
23-24 April	St. John's	National awareness seminar in Antigua and Barbuda
27-28 April	St. John's	First workshop for national Latin American and the Caribbean CCD focal points in Antigua and Barbuda
29 April-1 May	St. John's	Fourth CCD regional meeting in Antigua and Barbuda Regional NGO workshop in Antigua and Barbuda held within the intergovernmental conference
26-29 May	Arequipa	International symposium on Nopal Opuntia in Peru
1 June	Santiago	Bi-national meeting (Argentina-Chile) on gender perspectives in Chile
2-3 June	Santiago	Meeting for the formulation of the subregional programme of the Puna Americana in Chile

14-16 October	Recife	First Africa/Latin America and the Caribbean forum on interregional cooperation in Brazil

Northern Mediterranean and other European regions

1997

16-17 October	Minsk	National awareness seminar in Belarus
21-22 October	Chisinau	National awareness seminar in Moldova

1998

27 February	Moscow	Round table in the Russian Federation
3-4 March	Baku	National awareness seminar in Azerbaijan
31 March	Geneva	Briefing for representatives of permanent missions of Eastern and Central European countries
7 May	Riga	National awareness seminar in Latvia
15 May	Bucharest	National awareness day in Romania
18-19 May	Sofia	National awareness seminar in Bulgaria
20-22 May	Izmir	National awareness seminar in Turkey
27 May	Brussels	Meeting of the European Commission and European Union Member States on establishing an Expert Group on Desertification in Belgium
28-30 May	Athens	Regional meeting of the Group of Annex IV countries in Greece
3-4 June	Valletta	National awareness seminar in Malta
17-18 June	Tirana	National awareness seminar in Albania
18-19 September	Sardinia	International seminar of the CCD Annex IV countries to assess desertification in the Mediterranean in Italy
21-22 September	Nicosia	National awareness seminar in Cyprus
5-10 October	Marrakech	International seminar on processes of desertification: benchmarks and indicators of impact in the Mediterranean Basin in Morocco
29-30 October	Matera	Second international forum on European policies to combat desertification in the Mediterranean Basin in Italy